

WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS IN SCOTLAND

Yvonne Strachan and Lesley Sutherland

Introduction

An assessment of women's participation and locus in the trade unions in Scotland requires to be prefaced by a brief analysis of their position in employment.

As much of this has been dealt with under other sections of the Yearbook it is only necessary to outline the matter here. A cursory glance at women in and indeed out of paid employment suffices to show that they continue to be treated differently and less well than men, and that employment policies and strategies which fail to recognise the different employment experience of women discount over 50% of the population. One of the significant aspects of women's involvement in the trade union movement is that women are beginning to change how they and their work are perceived within the trade union movement.

The mainstream perception of women's employment is that it is peripheral to the individual and to the economy. This is despite the fact that women are frequently the sole wage earner, head the vast majority of single parent families and provide essential income in a substantial number of households. The notion that women's work is peripheral in terms of the economy is also questionable if one considers the rate and density of female employment and the hidden contribution of women's unpaid labour. Women bear the major burden of domestic responsibility and do the bulk of community and voluntary care. The myths about women's employment are fuelled by the fact that women's employment is often ignored in employment and economic strategies, and limited statistics and analyses are available on women in the labour market.

From what is available we are able to glean that women's participation in the labour market has increased over the last few years. The 1984 Census of Employment shows that the rate of female participation in employment is higher in Scotland at 44.2% than in Great Britain as a whole at 43.9%. The difference was solely attributable to a higher rate of female part-time employees in Scotland.⁽¹⁾

The part-time nature of much female employment is another feature. Women also experience interruption to work through maternity and

childcare or the care of other dependants. Women's employment tends also to be concentrated in certain sectors – e.g. the public services/caring services; component manufacture; retailing and clerical; and because women's work is so segregated, it has been undervalued and regarded as unskilled. This in turn creates the conditions for low and unequal pay. (see Table 1).

Women by the nature of their employment are much more vulnerable to being used as a reserve labour force – being drawn in and discarded from the labour market as expediency dictates. Government policy and employers' strategies, (such as, employing workers for fewer than 16 hours a week and thereby excluding them from such employment rights as are left, or paying less than £41 per week so as to avoid paying employers' National Insurance), conspire to make women a particularly vulnerable and exploited section of workers. Employers tend not to invest in part-time workers when it comes to training and indeed it is true that women generally have much less access to training and skills acquisition. To compound the situation, women's wages, on average, still remain (despite legislation) substantially below that of men's. In fact the General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union (GMBATU) neatly summed up the position of women with regard to earnings in a recent publication.⁽²⁾ They argued that sex bias is robbing women of some £15 billion per year and quoted the following statistics:

Whilst men who constituted 55% of the total employees in employment worked 64% of the hours, and had 72% of the total income from employment: women, who constituted 45% of employees, worked 36% of the hours, and took home only 28% of the income.

From current economic and employment trends, it seems unlikely that the position of women in employment is going to improve. The increase in part-time employment which ought ostensibly to provide greater opportunities for women, more often provides opportunities for greater exploitation, as such expansion has not been matched with the employment rights accorded to full-time employees. The trend towards the development of so-called 'green field' sites signals more low-skill employment in, for example, component assembly, in which women are presumed to be more competent. The Government's concerted attempts to strip the nation of its assets through the sale of the nationalised industries and the wholesale privatisation of local and public services has, and is having, a devastating effect on women's employment, in terms of lower wages and even fewer employment rights.

How then has the trade union movement responded to the predicament of women in the labour market?

TABLE 1 Employees in employment by occupational group, Scotland 1981.

Occupational group	Men			Women			Total (= 100%) 000's
	000's	%	Full-time 000's	%	Part-time 000's	%	
Professionals supporting management	44.8	77.7	11.2	19.4	1.6	2.8	57.6
Professionals in education, welfare and health	56.6	30.0	94.6	50.1	37.6	19.9	188.8
Literary, artistic and sports	6.1	58.3	2.9	28.1	1.4	13.6	10.5
Professionals in science, engineering, technology	73.6	91.9	6.0	7.4	0.5	0.7	80.0
Managerial	87.3	79.8	19.9	18.1	2.2	2.0	109.4
Clerical and related	75.6	23.8	186.2	58.6	56.2	17.7	318.0
Selling	43.2	32.4	42.5	31.9	47.7	35.8	133.3
Security and protective service	48.7	91.0	3.0	5.6	1.8	3.4	53.6
Catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal service	43.7	17.6	77.2	31.3	127.6	51.4	248.5
Farming, fishing and related	40.6	91.9	2.3	5.1	1.3	3.0	44.2
Materials, processing, making and repairing (excl metal & electrical)	97.2	64.1	45.0	29.6	9.5	6.3	151.7
Processing, making, repairing etc (metal & electrical)	222.4	96.7	7.0	3.0	0.5	0.2	229.9
Painting, repetitive assembling, product inspecting, packaging etc	38.9	54.7	28.2	39.6	4.0	5.7	71.2
Construction, mining etc	69.8	99.5	0.3	0.5	-	-	70.2
Transport operating, materials moving and storing	130.5	94.6	6.0	4.4	1.4	1.0	137.9
Miscellaneous	40.6	89.6	4.1	9.0	0.7	1.5	45.4
Inadequately described	8.1	53.3	5.5	35.9	1.6	10.8	15.2
Total	1127.6	57.4	541.7	27.6	295.8	15.1	1965.1

Source: Census 1981 Scotland: Economic Activity, Table 3.

Over the past ten years or so the unions have become more sensitive to the experiences and needs of women. In the following sections the representative aspects of women's participation and their impact on policy and campaigns is examined. It is important, however, not to omit or disregard less tangible aspects such as changes in the perceptions and attitudes towards women in the trade unions. This shift, it may be argued, emanates from three main sources. The first is from women in trade union themselves. Women's involvement in trade unions is not a new phenomenon. Indeed Esther Breitenbach identified a reference to women's union action as early as 1852 by the Edinburgh Maidservants Union Society.⁽³⁾ Moreover, women engaged in industrial disputes and campaigns have frequently shown themselves to be committed, tenacious and inventive in their strategies. For example at Lee Jeans the women occupied the factory in the face of closure and subsequently set up a co-operative to maintain production. This spirit was refreshing when other closures in the central belt had met with little resistance. The women at Plessey had wholeheartedly defended their factory at Bathgate and were instrumental in generating widespread community support for the campaign against closure. The factory did in fact close but several of the women activists continue to work and campaign in the West Lothian area. Women against Pit closures which emerged from the combined efforts of women in the mining communities during the miners strike, demonstrated to the movement how women, hitherto not involved in political activity, could effectively organise solidarity and generate widespread national political and financial support. So successful was the organisation of women that in many areas it was their support which sustained the strike. The impact of the women's organisation was felt, not only on the strike but in the domestic relationships of the women and indeed in the relationship of the women's groups to the NUM itself. Consideration was given to the women's demand for associate membership, a demand which had been agreed in the Scottish Area, but did not take effect nationally.

Women have, therefore, come to demand more from their unions, in terms of recognition of their status and a responsiveness to their needs as women workers. This development is linked in its evolution to the second source – the growth of the women's movement and feminism together with the movements for equality and civil rights. These movements highlighted the subordinate role of women in society. Thirdly, the trade unions themselves have been forced to review their organisation, their structures and their traditional recruitment policies – particularly those unions whose industrial base was most affected by the onslaught on traditional manufacturing industries perpetrated through the Government's economic policies. Unions have had to examine how to sustain their membership and indeed expand it. As part-time and temporary workers are notoriously ill-organised, unions have seen them as a potential source of new members. Moreover the changes in employment patterns mentioned above are engaging more women in the labour market and altering the profile of 'a

worker'; no longer so readily identifiable as a white, semi-skilled, male, working full-time in a large factory and sole family wage earner. It would be improper to conclude, however, that unions are involved only in a cynical recruitment exercise. While undoubtedly unions are anxious to recruit, they also have to meet the articulated demands of their women members. Unions have, therefore, also given attention to their image and considered seriously how they might increase their attraction and responsiveness to women members.

Trade unions constitute the means of collective representation and protection at work and this applies to all workers whether male or female. It is incumbent on the unions to ensure that they are capable of embracing the needs of all members. The attempt to weaken unions through legislation and the judicial process, as we have witnessed in the 1980/82 Employment Acts and the 1984 Trade Union Act and in the removal of legislation on recognition rights, has made the job of organising workers more difficult, particularly in areas of low unionisation, such as part-time employment. The situation for vulnerable groups of workers, including women, is aggravated by the erosion of employment protection such as maternity and unfair dismissal rights, and is most certainly not helped by the strategies of some employers. These include employing people at sufficiently few hours so that earnings fall below the threshold at which it is necessary to pay National Insurance contributions; and employing more part-time workers because this reduces costs in the areas of pensions, holidays, overtime, and even the basic rate of pay. Furthermore the Government's White Papers entitled 'Lifting the Burden' and 'Building Businesses not Barriers' give some indication of its attitude towards employment protection. The Government see protection as a barrier to job creation and a burden on employers. Part-time workers can expect their pay and conditions to deteriorate further if the proposals contained in these papers come into effect. The proposed increase in the number of hours required to be worked before a worker is covered by employment protection is an area of major concern, and the effects would be felt by a considerable number of women part-time workers. Women therefore have been playing, and must continue to play, a significant role in sustaining and developing trade unions to meet the challenges of the times.

Membership and Participation in Trade Unions

The capacity to influence change depends very much on the influence one exerts on the instruments of change – in this case the trade union movement. The degree of influence is often commensurate with the degree of participation, representation and extent to which one's views are considered. For women then it is crucial that they are represented in and enabled to participate fully in the trade union movement.

It is virtually impossible to provide an accurate statistical statement of

the size and extent of women's involvement in the trade union movement in Scotland. Very few studies have been done on the subject and there is a lack of relevant data. Many unions do not differentiate between men and women in their membership returns and in turn are unable to register the number of women members with the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC). Furthermore, there are few singularly Scottish unions and of the British unions, not all will keep membership figures for Scotland. It has been known for some unions to estimate their Scottish female membership based on national percentages. This, however, is inaccurate and does not take account of regional variation which can be quite substantial. (For example, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) has a national figure of women workers of 16% whilst the Scottish figure is 22%.) this means that the STUC figure of 300,000 women members out of a total of 910,000 may well be an underestimate.

Two studies have been helpful to those interested in this area of women's involvement. Esther Breitenbach in her book 'Women Workers in Scotland' (1982) provides the fullest examination of women at work and in trade unions in Scotland (this study is referred to in John Leopold's paper – 'Trade Unions in the 1990s'). The statistics are drawn from 1979 figures and clearly there have been changes since then, but our experience would indicate that many of her conclusions remain valid today. The second study, conducted by the Trade Union Research Unit (TURU) in 1986 for the STUC, attempts to provide details of the participation and representation of women in the trade union movement in Scotland.

Although a number of unions did not respond to the survey, the information provided demonstrates very clearly that women are still not proportionately represented within their unions and confirms our experience that women still face barriers to their fullest participation, see Table 2.

To a certain extent we should not be surprised, if disappointed, that this section of the working population has been neglected for so long. Historically trade unions have given scant attention to the needs of women. Indeed several unions debarred women from membership for a considerable time. Despite the crusading efforts of women who, at the turn of the century and into the 1920s, laid the foundations for women in trade unions – and of course the impact of the active role of women during the war years – women generally were not regarded as key workers, but rather as cheap labour, peripheral to the economy. Women were primarily seen as houseworkers, responsible for the children and the domestic maintenance of the man/men of the house, and whenever domestic or national circumstances dictated, they could be drawn into the labour market. Once in paid employment they occupied low status, low paid jobs and the opportunity for improvement often eluded them as domestic commitments and employers' attitudes rarely opened up access to training and

TABLE 2 Representation of Women within a sample of Unions in Scotland 1985/86.

Union	Total Memb.	Female Memb	% of Women	Total FTO	Female FTO	
TGWU	132,564	30,416	23	54	3	(10)
GMB	115,941	44,750	39	29	3	(11)
AEU	95,000	15,000	16	19	0	(3)
NUPE	71,443	48,581	68	16	2	(11)
USDAW	45,396	29,103	64	20	1	(13)
EIS	45,559	29,150	64	14	3	(9)
COHSE	24,600	20,172	82	5	0	(4)
BIFU	22,000	11,500	52	4	1	(2)
NUR	12,376	693	6	2	0	-
APEX	6,117	3,485	57	4	0	(3)
NUJ	2,251	475	21	1	0	-

TURU Survey 1986

The figures in brackets denote the number of female full-time officers (FTO) posts which should exist in relations to the number of women members.

(The pattern of under-representation is repeated if one examines the decision-making committees of trade unions and the leading lay positions.)

promotion. As trade union members, women frequently found that they were regarded as second class members.

They were often, in the early days, regarded with suspicion and treated as inferior because they paid lower union contributions. Few women participated in the management of unions and, as is the case today, women did not find it easy to get involved in union activities. In 1920 Barbara Drake, in a study commissioned by (LRD), highlighted the problems faced by women in trade unions and the obstacles to their participation. She observed that most women were employed in a limited number of occupations which were largely unskilled and low paid. Most women had a broken term of industrial life and women's work was widely undervalued. In most industries women did not receive equal pay. The work status of women was reflected in their status within the trade union movement. Most women found it hard to participate in union activities; and the reasons cited were the burden of home duties, the comparative lack of experience, and the long tradition of women's social and economic dependence on men. These problems mirror the situation today. Women were not being considered and did not have the power, control or influence within trade unions to bring about the necessary changes.

The last two decades have begun to alter this situation. As we described in the Introduction, several factors have shifted the perspectives of trade unions. The 1970s witnessed the construction of a legislative framework to begin to combat discrimination against women in employment, such as the Sex Discrimination Act, Equal Pay Act, and Employment Protection Act (viz. maternity rights). A corresponding shift in emphasis on women has taken place within most political party programmes, and trade unions have taken up the issue, not only with respect to policy and campaigns but in terms of internal structures and representation. Conference agendas began to reflect the demand for increased rights/representation, the call for positive action programmes and more imagination in the areas of recruitment and organisation. An examination of the facts led trade unions to accept that the lack of women involved in decision-making and policy formulation meant that their perspective was missing. This was particularly evident in the field of pay bargaining where claims reflected the concerns of the male full-time workers – percentage increases, bonus payments, guaranteed minimum hours and overtime payments. Pay claims were very rarely loaded in favour of the low paid or part-time workers. Further issues like maternity/parental agreements were rarely confronted. At the same time unions recognised that to expect the situation to change without an intervention was naive. Hence the move to positive action programmes and internal change.

Several unions established Women's Advisory Committees (Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers (USDAW), National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union (GMB)) others like the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical, and Computer Staff (APEX), established Equal Opportunities Committees. The purpose was to feed the views of women directly into the decision making committees of the Unions. Some unions introduced special seats on their leading committees to enable direct representation. NUPE had a particularly successful experience of this where, by creating five reserved women's seats, they were able to generate the environment for more women to seek election. Now more women sit on the executive committee through the traditional route than occupy the women's seats. Several unions hold women's conferences through which policy development can take place and one or two unions have appointed women's officers to try and concentrate attention on the needs of women workers. So, it might be argued, if all this change was taking place over the last decade, how is it that the statistics present such a grim picture? Have any of these measures changed anything? We believe they have.

Several unions in Scotland have increased the proportion of women members (TGWU, Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), NUPE, MSF, Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers (NUTGW))⁽⁴⁾; others have

increased the number of women full time officers in Scotland (EIS, TGWU, GMB, USDAW). NUPE, TGWU, NUTGW all report increases on their leading national committees and EIS over the last three years has increased the representation of women on its Council and Executive by 6% and 4% respectively⁽⁵⁾. NUPE also state that up until 1983 it had not had a woman President; since then there have been four.⁽⁶⁾

Delegations to union and political conferences have been improved in favour of women in some unions for example, the TGWU has eleven reserved places for women on its delegations to both the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Labour Party Conferences; and in Scotland, the TGWU regional delegations to both the STUC and Scottish Labour Party conferences have three reserved places for women. Furthermore, at the STUC level, the number of reserved seats for women has increased from two to three.

Statistics are, of course, important but they cannot give a complete picture of the progress being made by women in trade unions in Scotland, nor indeed do we measure the involvement of women members solely in terms of the number of women occupying official positions in the Unions. Other changes indicate the movement taking place within trade unions.

Unions have recognised that if women are to be recruited into unions, and indeed if they are to stay and participate, then unions must be relevant, and attractive to women and capable of delivering the demands of women. To this end, recruitment is high on the agendas of all unions and for some, most notably, TGWU, USDAW, and the GMB, there is a particular emphasis being laid on part-time and temporary workers. This has meant that unions have not only attempted to improve their official representation, but they have also attempted to improve services, published materials, education, benefits, organisation, policy and campaigns.

To illustrate, some unions have introduced a reduced rate of contribution for part-time workers and for women on maternity leave; others are considering whether the benefits they offer are discriminatory. Most unions have begun to publish special material for women members and publications for general use which highlight the areas of concern for women workers. For example, USDAW have produced some excellent pamphlets on equal pay and cervical cancer screening; NUPE have recently launched a very impressive pack on women's health; TGWU have a useful set of shop stewards' handbooks on equal pay/sexual harassment/part-time working and maternity rights; GMB have comprehensive pamphlets on a range of issues dealing with women's working lives; and many unions, including the STUC Women's Committee, produce bulletins especially for women members. Perhaps the most significant indication of the change in the types of produced materials was during the Alton Bill campaign at the

beginning of 1988. At least two unions, NUPE and Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) produced national material on abortion rights and several unions including NALGO produced local material. Such a situation would not have been possible a few years ago.

One area where women have been particularly critical of unions has been in terms of branch organisation. It is clear that overly formal meetings, conducted in jargon, on issues of selected interest, held in the evenings, have rarely inspired women to attend. Furthermore, the fact that previously fewer women occupied branch official positions in many unions or that childcare arrangements were almost non-existent compounded this lack of appeal to women. When women did not attend branch meetings a charge of apathy was often levelled rather than a concerted effort made to discover why women did not attend and measures taken to rectify the problems. The attendance at branch meetings generally is a problem for trade unions and has heightened the resolve of many unions to investigate, and where necessary improve, branch organisation and activity. Such an examination is opportune because the organisational requirements of part-time workers and temporary labour are different from those of full-time workers in large single site factory or office complexes. A recent survey conducted for Labour Research Department has indicated that more women are occupying branch positions and this may augur well for a change in branch attendance by women.

A further aspect of organisation which was deemed to be very important for women is the whole area of childcare facilities. As is indicated later, many unions have strong policy on childcare and indeed the STUC is engaged in highlighting the importance of childcare to women's participation in the labour market and the economy. Meanwhile trade unions themselves have recognised that the lack of childcare arrangements can be a barrier to women participating fully in the union's activities. It is therefore an issue being discussed by many unions. Provision is patchy as getting the right level and type of arrangement has been difficult to deliver. To a certain extent there is still resistance – bringing women into the trade union domain is tolerable but children are just too much! But more often than not there are practical hurdles to be overcome and matching what is practical and possible to what is expected. EIS and the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT), have child minding allowance schemes and this is gaining currency as a viable alternative to creche facilities where appropriate. The STUC and most unions have facilities at their national conferences, residential schools and women's events.

Education has made a major contribution to increasing the confidence of women to take part in their unions and to develop the skills and knowledge to become active within it. Most unions provide specialist courses for women members and endeavour to incorporate the problems facing women workers in their general education programmes. The STUC

Women's Committee runs four weekend schools a year and these are very well attended.

Some unions have taken the question of women's participation so seriously that they have conducted special surveys to determine precisely the situation. The GMB surveyed their national and local agreements and in conjunction with national statistics compiled a report and programme for equality.⁽⁷⁾ NUPE has initiated a major review of women's participation in the Union and the data for this will be collected by late 1988. It is intended that this information will pave the way for implementing further strategies to increase women's participation in the future.

The STUC Women's Committee and Women's Conference have both undergone change in recent years. The conference gets larger every year and the attendance is an indication of the interest it now attracts. It is now very rare to see delegations led by men and indeed very few unions actually have men on their delegations. More members of the General Council attend as observers and the report of the Conference now goes to Congress. Changes have occurred within the Women's Committee. The title of 'advisory' has been dropped and the Committee now has the right to report directly to Congress on the activities of the committee. Internal communication between the committee and the General Council has improved and the influence of the committee has grown. There has been an increase in the number of women delegates attending the STUC Congress but the proportion is still very disappointing. Happily efforts from the STUC Women's Committee have improved the number of motions, relating to areas of interest for women, that appear on the agenda of Congress.

The importance of the change in the representation and participation of women is not just about numerical improvements, nor indeed only about policy development and changed campaigning priorities, it is also about a different way of doing things. Women recognise the need for structure and organisation but attach less importance to formality. Many meetings of women in the movement are relatively informal and tend to be organised to maximise involvement and build up confidence. Essentially women are trying to find ways to get more involved, to have a greater voice in union affairs and to change things. Some men, on the other hand, already are involved and have a voice, but have less impetus to change. Of course, many men do recognise the need to change to accommodate the needs of women. It is, however, women who are the catalysts for organisational change. For example, union meetings where women have had some influence have undergone a process of 'Glasnost'. Greater concern has been given to the use of language and attempts made to demystify the procedures; the timing of meetings and the accessibility of venues has been considered; agenda items are more carefully selected to be more relevant to women; branch officers are charged with the responsibility of encouraging

members to participate in debate; childcare facilities are now given due consideration; and even the seating at meetings is organised to create the most productive environment. One spin off from the impact of women on branch meetings has been that meetings are more relevant and easily understood by everyone – male and female – and this it is hoped will assist the revitalisation of union branch life in some quarters.

Policies and Campaigns

Women's impact on the trade unions and union's desire to be more attractive to women can be readily seen in the policies unions and the STUC adopt.

The STUC Women's conference debates the whole gamut of trade union issues including those which particularly affect women. It does so because all matters which affect women in employment are, by definition, trade union issues. At the 1987 STUC Women's conference issues such as the economy and industrial development encompassing debate on the manufacturing base, iron and steel and the coalfields, were discussed. If it may seem that such issues are remote from women given their numbers in the industries, it is argued forcibly that the economic wellbeing of the community is tied to the success of wealth-creating industry. In adopting a wide perspective, women have been a progressive force within unions. Reference has been made to the role of women against pit closures and the women's support groups during the Miner's strike. They evolved new means of organising, constructed new alliances and forged new links, not only organisationally but also in how we interpret the relationships between employment, economy and community. Women within the unions, benefiting from that experience and drawing on their own, are feeding a similar kind of perspective, analysis and organisation into their own representative bodies.

Being capable of adopting a broad-based approach to what are legitimate areas of concern has ensured that women's organisation and campaigns are not sidelined. There have been those who subscribe to the idea that women should organise separately, not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. The force with which this was advocated by some in the early 70s served to dissuade many women from taking part in women's activities for fear of marginalising their concerns/demands and undermining the concept of trade unionism – the unity of the workforce. However, the majority of women within the trade union movement now accept the necessity for women to organise together to achieve change in the movement. They do not see such organisation as a replacement for the movement. Hence the tension of the early 70s has lessened and a consensus has developed that women's organisation provides the base from which women can increase the impact they have on their own union and the movement as a whole.

One area in which this impact on policy and campaigns may be observed is in the profile given to pay and conditions – at the heart of trade union concern. Women, as we have said, are concentrated in low paid jobs frequently associated with poor conditions, for example in holiday pay, sick pay and pensions. Women constitute the bulk of part-time workers who in turn experience low pay, poor conditions or exclusion from employment protection rights by virtue of the number of hours they work. Recognising this, several unions have launched campaigns to combat low pay, such as TGWU's Living Wage Campaign and those of NUPE and USDAW. Other unions, the large general unions among them, have analysed the trend in work patterns, identifying them as predominantly female and have developed recruitment campaigns accordingly. GMBATU has targeted hotels, catering and distribution whilst the TGWU has given priority to recruitment amongst part-time and temporary workers in both private and public sectors. All unions recognise that the law as it currently stands offers very little to the worker and that improvements will be best achieved by collective organisation and bargaining. However, unions also recognise now that with respect to low pay, there is a need to enhance the bargaining process through statute and the movement is committed to a policy of a statutory minimum wage (SMW). Indeed the TGWU, long opposed to the SMW, shifted its policy in 1987. This reflects the impact of women, who make up the bulk of low paid workers, within the movement.

Equal Pay is a significant area of union action. The evidence is plain that women are not equally rewarded for their labour, and some of the reasons have been referred to above. A Government which had to be dragged unwillingly into line by a European Directive is not likely to bring in protective legislation of its own accord nor to put pressure on employers. Unions have taken up the cudgels despite the protracted nature of the procedures and have achieved successes. After seventeen years, the women at Ford won equal pay; Julie Hayward, supported by her union GMB, succeeded after five years; the TGWU recorded successes with the fish packers in Hull, Freemans (Pickstone) and Walter Alexander (Falkirk) to name but a few. The task is difficult not only because the law is so complex, but because apprehension and even hostility sometimes exists amongst male union members. This has to be tackled as indeed the built-in bias of collective agreements should be challenged, where the underlying assumption is that the worker is male, white, full-time and employed in heavy manufacturing.

Despite the difficulties, a growing number of cases are being taken up, for example Apex has ten cases at Industrial Tribunal and a further twenty cases under negotiation. This is good news for women members.

Women rightly give a high profile in what might be loosely described as 'social policy'. This concern is not only historical but a reflection of

women's experience. The quality of the social wage is very important for women not only because women are frequently employed in the industries which deliver the social wage – local authorities, the National Health Service (NHS) and other caring and service industries – but also because they are expected to deliver through their unpaid labour wherever there are shortfalls.

Two areas reveal the overlapping concerns of women and social policy in unions. No doubt because of recent changes in pension provision, the impoverished position of women has been highlighted. Not only are women themselves disadvantaged in terms of pensions, but also it frequently falls on them to care for elderly relatives. The other area is in women's health. Many trade unions have produced specialist information relating to women's health. Several unions have highlighted cervical cancer screening as a priority and have conducted campaigns both to raise awareness and to establish it as a negotiating issue. As women have been and are becoming more prominent in the workforce the effect of employment on women's health has become an issue for trade unions.

Perhaps even more significant in revealing the changing status of women and the issues that are relevant to them within unions are those that relate to women's control over their own bodies. Sexual harassment is one such issue and no matter how hard unions may find it to deal with, at least at policy level, the fact that it exists is now acknowledged. This is indeed a significant change in union's perceptions. Some unions have stated quite explicitly that the victim should be supported and that apart from ensuring fairness and justice in terms of procedure, they will not support the harasser. Others have been less explicit but recognise sexual harassment as a genuine grievance. It would be naive to assume that sexual harassment does not continue to be a widespread industrial problem nor that it is not perpetrated, on occasion, by one union member on another. Notwithstanding this, acknowledgement of this issue as valid for union action and concern is a progressive development. Further evidence of unions' growing reflection of women's perspectives manifested itself during the recent campaign against the Alton Bill. The position achieved within the trade union movement that it was a woman's right to choose and that any dilution of this was a component of regressive social policy, held firm and the STUC and its affiliates played an active and committed role in the Fight Alton Bill campaign.

Returning to those aspects of policy which more directly affect women at work, one of the reasons why women continue to occupy lowly paid, low status jobs is their unequal access to education and training which in turn afford access to different sectors of work. There has been a long-running campaign to achieve improved access to quality education and training particularly in science and technology. Effort has also gone into pointing out where schemes, whether Government inspired or other, discriminate

against women's participation through restrictions, location, timing or other factors.

Progress needs to be made in the field of childcare where the promised nursery expansion has still to take place and statutory maternity rights are the worst in Europe. For example Belgium, Denmark, France, West Germany, Spain and Sweden all have less restrictive periods of qualification for benefits and all have better maternity pay arrangements than Britain. The Government has little desire to increase rights in this area as can be seen from the loss of maternity rights which took place through the Employment Act (increasing the period of qualification from one year to two years); and the loss of the maternity benefit through the Social Security Act. The implementation of the proposals in the Employment White Papers will also increase the number of women who will no longer qualify for maternity rights. Similarly it was the British Government which vetoed the introduction of the EEC Directive on Parental Leave which would have given every parent three months off in the first two years (five years in the case of handicapped children) to meet parental responsibilities.

Unions have managed to negotiate better maternity agreements in some areas and the demand of women in the trade unions has been for an expansion in provision not only in maternity arrangements but also in paternity and parental leave agreements. Here in Scotland, the trade unions have been vocal in highlighting the importance of childcare in terms of the contribution of women in the economy and a number of developments are taking place. The STUC Women's Committee is currently examining a trade union strategy on childcare. The Standing Commission on the Scottish Economy has considered this question seriously and discussion is taking place around the feasibility of partnership in provision between local authorities, employers and the community. Internally, unions are looking at how best to provide facilities to meet the needs of women members.

Whilst all of these issues are debated and acted upon, it should not be assumed that women's aims have been achieved. There are few policy makers who would deny that women should have equality, getting it put into practice however is more difficult. Progress is slow. Discrimination exists at all levels even in the language of the movement. However, where there was ignorance or neglect, there is at least now sensitivity and awareness and indeed acceptance that the concerns of women are the concerns of the whole trade union movement. The trade unions can no longer ignore their women members nor fail to see that women are vital to the future of the trade union movement. It is also to be hoped that unions recognise that the trade union movement gains from the participation of women not only numerically but in terms of a wider vision, a more comprehensive perspective and enhanced democracy.

Conclusion

As we can see there have been a number of improvements in the position of women within the trade unions in Scotland. Movement has taken place in the scale of representation although this has been small for the most part. Much needs to be done to improve the level of representation of women on leading committees, in official positions and particularly on negotiating committees. This question is most certainly on the agenda of union Women's Committees. The changes which have taken place on the recruitment and campaigning fronts are more positive. Here, resources, and attention are being deployed to address the recruitment of part-time and temporary workers, and unions have seen the necessity of focusing on campaigns specifically relevant to women. As a consequence of this change in the campaigning and recruitment profile, the image of trade unions is beginning to change. Unions are recognising the need to communicate in a modern way; to give attention to how attractive the union is to potential members; and to look at how it projects itself. Some change has, therefore, taken place in the number of women who are represented in the advertising of unions; in the union's resource materials; and indeed in the personnel endeavouring to get the union message across. However, this approach is still young, and we still have some way to go in dispelling the 'male, grey' image of trade unions.

Of course, there are those who have a vested interest in tarring the image of trade unions. It could be argued that some employers and the Government are intent on presenting trade unions as obsolete – dinosaurs in a modern world. We know that unions are not obsolete, but we have to convince an increasingly non-unionised workforce that to gain improvements in their working lives and to maintain and extend employment rights, we need a strong and active trade union movement. The importance of this question is emphasised for women when we consider that women will make up an increasing part of the workforce in the coming years, and the forecast is that the proportion of part-time workers will also increase. The demographic trend is that by the 1990s there will be a substantial reduction in the number of 15-24 year olds in the labour market and employers have already begun to experience a skill shortage. This situation is spurring some employers into action to recruit/retain women workers. We understand for example: the Royal Bank of Scotland is looking at mortgage facilities for its part-time workers; is developing its equal opportunities policy; and considering the question of parental leave.

The prospect therefore that women will have greater bargaining power in the coming years is dependent on trade unions successfully recruiting and organising women workers. The potential is there and the unions should grasp the opportunity presented to us.

At the same time, however, the trade unions recognise only too readily

that this Government has a clear employment strategy which does not wish to extend the protective and employment rights of workers, least of all part-time workers. There is unlikely to be any positive change to the legislative framework for employment in the lifetime of this Government although the impact of the Single European Market in 1992 may result in some legislative improvement in the future. This is possible because, as discussed above, other countries in Europe have tended to have more progressive legislation on women than Britain.

The demand of the trade union movement is, however, to continue to seek legislative change in the areas of low pay, equal pay, part-time work, parental leave, maternity rights, childcare provision, employment protection and of course in trade union rights. The latter is crucial. The improvements to women's working lives will not be assisted by an emasculated trade union movement or indeed by the inability of trade unions to effectively organise and represent their members.

Whatever the difficulties, there is growing recognition that women are a significant part of the workforce with a key role to play in the Scottish economy. The steps taken to improve our representation and organisation within the trade union movement may seem small but they mark progress. Women in the trade union movement do get frustrated and tired of the time it takes for many of our demands to gain recognition, but we are optimistic. Because change *must* come for the survival of the trade union movement and indeed the betterment of the movement, it *will* come.

Yvonne Strachan, Women's Officer, Transport & General Workers' Union.

Lesley Sutherland, Education and Research Officer, Transport and General Workers' Union.

References

1. Standing Commission on the Scottish Economy, *Interim Report*, February 1988.
2. GMB, *Winning a Fair Deal for Women*, 1988, p.3.
3. E Breitenbach, *Women Workers in Scotland*, Pressgang 1982, p.40.
4. TURU, *Trade Union Women in Scotland: A Statistical Report*, 1986, passim.
5. EIS, *Response to WCOTP questionnaire on women's issues*, 1988, passim.

6. NUPE, Vice-Presidential Address – Ina Love, May 1988.
7. GMB, *op cit*.
8. TUC, *Survey of TUC Course participants*, 1988, quoted Labour Research, September 1988, Vol.77, Number 9, pp.19-20.